

Beumers, Birgit (ed.). A Companion to Russian Cinema, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to National Cinemas, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester and Malden, MA, 2016. xvi + 656 pp. Illustrations. Notes. References. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. \$195: £156 (hardback); \$156.99: £140.99 (e-book).

PART of The Wiley Blackwell Companions to National Cinemas series, the much anticipated A Companion to Russian Cinema is a rich and capacious volume. Edited by Birgit Beumers, one of the field's most knowledgeable and indefatigable scholars, it comprises 25 newly commissioned chapters, written by leading experts and academics working in Russian cinema studies independently or at various American, British, Canadian, French, Hungarian and Russian institutions.

In her helpful Introduction, which provides a concise survey of the state of the field and outlines the Companion's scope and structure, Beumers acknowledges that attempting to provide a comprehensive account of the whole history of Russian cinema in the Companion would have been 'ambitiously [to] aim at the impossible' (p. 1). Instead, therefore, she elects to focus on the 'task of "filling gaps"' (p. 4), by including contributions that explore some of the significant films, periods, filmmakers and genres that have been 'traditionally neglected in film histories and scholarship' (p. 2). Divided into five thematically organized parts, the Companion thus seeks to provide 'five alternative histories of Russian cinema' (p. 16). Accordingly, within each part the chapters are arranged in a loosely chronological order, to convey a 'sense of progression' (p. 4). While each of the five parts does not cover the complete one-hundred-and-ten-year period since Russian feature filmmaking began, the Companion as a whole does broadly achieve this. If there are gaps in its coverage, however, this is intentional; in Beumers' words, 'The more holes we have laid bare, the better' (p. 16), for the volume thus aims 'to uncover new areas for investigation, and trigger exciting new research to fill [those] gaps' (p. 16).

Part 1, 'Structures of Production, Formation, and Exhibition', focuses on the establishment, during the first half of the twentieth century, of institutional infrastructures relating to film exhibition, to the training of filmmakers and to film production. In Chapter 1, Anna Kovalova, building on Lurii Tsiv'ian's seminal work on early Russian cinema and its cultural reception, offers a history of the many cinemas that lined St Petersburg's Nevskii Prospect in the period 1900-1910. Rich in fascinating details gleaned from memoirs and the contemporary film press, Kovalova's account vividly evokes the experience of the average film-goer in this period. Chapter 2, by Masha Salazkina, explores the development of Soviet film education in the 1920s and 1930s by providing a history of Moscow's State Film Institute VGIK, the world's first specialized film school, founded in 1919 to train the first generation of Soviet filmmakers. Each of the remaining three chapters focuses on a film studio. Robert Bird contributes a history of Lenfil'm, Russia's second-largest studio, surveying films made there between 1919 and 2014 and exploring the extent to which the studio possessed and retains a defining 'institutional aesthetic' (p. 66). Oksana Sarkisova focuses on Vostokfil'm, best known for its production of the educational kul'turfil'm, a key genre during the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s and one which, through informing viewers about life in the Soviet 'periphery' (the newly acquired territories in the Far East and Central Asia) sought to redefine Soviet identity. Finally, Jeremy Hicks contributes an informative exploration

of the pioneering Soiuzdetfil'm (later known as the Gor'kii Film Studio), one of the world's first studios to be devoted entirely to making children's films. Focusing on the period 1936-1945 and taking Mark Donskoi's The Childhood of Maksim Gor'kii (1938) as a case study, Hicks explores, inter alia, how Soviet filmmakers rose to the challenges inherent in making children's cinema and developed generic models that satisfied contemporary ideological requirements.

Part 2, 'For the State or for the Audience? Auteurism, Genre, and Global Markets', focuses on the consumption of films, exploring issues of taste and of genre from the perspectives of audiences and the authorities and covering the period 1934-2012. Two chapters are devoted to the mainstream genre of the comedy film: Richard Taylor discusses the Stalinist musical comedy of the 1930s, while Seth Graham considers the development of the film comedy in the 1950s and 1960s. In Chapter 8, the focus shifts from the mainstream, with Eugénie Zvonkine's exploration of Soviet auteur filmmaking during the so-called Thaw and Stagnation eras. Chapter 9, by Dawn Seckler and Stephen Norris, focuses on the development in the late 1990s and 2000s of the Russian blockbuster [blokbuster]. The Part concludes with a fascinating chapter by Maria Bezenkova and Xenia Leontyeva of Nevafil'm Research, a leading analytical agency for Russian cinema, which uses sociological data to explore the different ways in which recent Russian cinema (2004-2012) addresses national themes in a global context.

The six interesting and often innovative chapters in Part 3, 'Sound – Image – Text', explore under-researched areas of Russian filmmaking. Chapters 12 and 13 explore the development, during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, of different cinematic technologies: Phil Cavendish examines the Soviet film industry's early experiments with colour film and considers the ideological and aesthetic significance of this development, while Lilya Kaganovsky explores the arrival of sound in Soviet cinema, considering both early experiments with sound and its impact on film aesthetics. Three chapters examine the contribution to the filmmaking process of creative figures other than the director, emphasizing cinema's collective and collaborative nature. In Chapter 11, Maria Belodubrovskaya explores the role of the scriptwriter, while, in Chapter 14, Emma Widdis discusses that of the set designer. After providing an overview of existing work on this subject in the fields of Russian cinema studies and of film studies more broadly, Widdis turns her attention to early Soviet set design and its evolution throughout the 1920s and 1930s, demonstrating how the set designer's role was formalized, professionalized and influenced by contemporary ideological imperatives. Chapter 15, by Djurdja Bartlett, offers a wide-ranging exploration of fashion and film costumes in the same period, considering the clothes worn by actresses both for their film roles and in their public life. The part concludes with Peter Rollberg's discussion of five men (Iurii Zheliabuzhskii, Eduard Tissé, Mikhail Kalatozov, Boris Volchek and Sergei Urusevskii) who worked both as cinematographers and as directors.

The chapters in Part 4, 'Time and Space, History and Place', explore the use of different temporal/historical and spatial settings: Denise Youngblood discusses three films made after the introduction of Socialist Realism in 1934 that all look back at the revolutionary period; Stephen Norris focuses on war films and their treatment of the theme of defending the motherland; Kevin Platt examines the representation of Riga

in post-War Soviet cinema; Beumers considers the changing representation of Moscow in films made across a 90-year period (1924-2014).

Part 5, 'Directors' Portraits', contains five studies of key figures in Soviet and Russian film whose work is relatively neglected in English-language scholarship. Julian Graffy focuses on Boris Barnet, who worked in the Soviet film industry from the early 1920s until his untimely death in 1965. In addition to exploring all the films Barnet directed, Graffy's exhaustive account also covers Barnet's early years as a champion boxer and his first film work, as an energetic actor cast in the comic role of Cowboy Jeddy in Lev Kuleshov's The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks (1924). In tracing Barnet's long career so closely, Graffy also sheds light on the history of Soviet cinema and on the socio-political and intellectual contexts in which he worked. Jamie Miller then considers Lulii Raizman, whose career ran from the 1920s to the 1980s. Focusing selectively on films in which, he argues, Raizman depicts the private side of life, Miller suggests that it is Raizman's willingness to 'defend' the Soviet citizen's right to a 'private and intimate worldview' that makes him a significant director (p. 516). Elena Prokhorova contributes a chapter on Leonid Gaidai, best known for his enduringly popular slapstick comedies made during the 1960s and 1970s, while Anthony Anemone considers the auteur director Aleksei German Senior. Finally, Nancy Condee examines Andrei Zviagintsev, universally considered one of the most talented and significant filmmakers working in Russia today and one of the few whose films have achieved international acclaim.

Beumers stresses in her introduction that these five directors have been chosen not because they are 'the "right" ones' (pp. 14-15); instead, she explains, their inclusion depends on the fact that they were selected by the five authors. Beumers' decision to allow contributors a free choice over the focus of their chapter is one of the Companion's strengths. In this way, the volume is able both to provide a snapshot of some of the innovative research currently being conducted by scholars working in Russian cinema studies and to offer an overview of the current state of the field. However, this light-touch approach perhaps also accounts for some of the volume's short-comings, which a firmer editorial hand might have eliminated. There is, for example, some overlap across chapters (two contributors write about Gaidai's films); the pre-1919 period of filmmaking is under-represented; and, while many of the chapters do address under-researched areas, others go over ground already covered in existing studies.

The Companion concludes with a useful chronology of key events in Russian cinema and history in the period 1896 to 2014. It also has an extensive Bibliography, and a full and extremely helpful index, which enables the reader to navigate the Companion with ease.

One question demands to be asked, however: why did the publisher not illustrate the Companion with colour images? To be sure, some of the illustrations come from black-and-white films. Others, however, do not. In Chapter 25, the reproduction, in flat black and white, of frame stills from Zviagintsev's evocative and carefully designed colour films is merely irritating. In other chapters, however, this oversight impacts negatively on the reader's ability to engage with the material. Thus, in Chapter 12 the frame stills selected by Cavendish to illustrate his discussion of the development and significance of colour - one of which comes from a film entitled A Carnival of Colours - fail to support his arguments, simply because they

are reproduced in black and white. The high price tag attached to the Companion makes this shortcut all the more disappointing.

These comments are not, of course, intended to detract from the considerable achievements of this ambitious volume. The Companion makes a significant contribution to the scholarly field, containing much that will interest, inform and inspire academics working in Russian cinema studies and in cinema studies more broadly. Scholars of the cultural history of Russia and the Soviet Union will also discover much of value here, as will the general reader. Likewise, undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research students will find the Companion an extremely useful addition to their university library, and many of its chapters – and, indeed, the volume as a whole - are sure to feature on their reading lists.

UCL SSEES

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